

# LITHUANIAN AIDES WON'T TURN OVER ARMY'S DESERTERS

## MOSCOW SETS A DEADLINE

After a Soviet Show of Force,  
Republic's Chief Asks the  
West for More Support

By ESTHER B. FEIN

Special to The New York Times

VILNIUS, Lithuania, March 24 — Lithuanian officials refused today to comply with Moscow's demand to turn over hundreds of army deserters, declaring that they would not be intimidated by the Kremlin's theatrical early morning parade of tanks and military vehicles here in the Lithuanian capital.

Lithuania's President, Vytautas Landsbergis, urged the young Lithuanian men, who fled the army after their republic proclaimed its independence March 11, to seek refuge in churches against a surrender deadline of midnight tonight set by the Soviet military.

"We will not sacrifice our sons," said Ceslovas Stankevicius, deputy chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament, defiant in the latest tense standoff over Lithuania's contested sovereignty. "They are citizens of a free country."

### Elections Proceed Calmly

Contrary to reports on Soviet television, Lithuania was anything but chaotic or seething with unrest today. Elections to city, county and neighborhood councils were conducted calmly throughout the republic, with a turnout estimated at about two-thirds of the electorate.

But Mr. Landsbergis called on the United States and other Western nations today to be more vocal in their support of Lithuania "in this dangerous situation," which he characterized as "psychological war."

In an emotional speech to Parliament, Mr. Landsbergis recalled how the deputies were working into the early morning hours when they learned of the unexpected military convoy headed into the capital.



Reuters

Armored vehicles in Vilnius on Friday in a photograph released by the Soviet news agency Novosti. Tanks were driven through the capital yesterday morning in a show of force apparently aimed at persuading Lithuanian officials to turn over Army deserters.

## **Convoy Passes Parliament**

The column wound provocatively past the Parliament building and many of the deputies ran outside to watch it.

"Last night's session was unique," Mr. Landsbergis said. "We will not forget it for a long time. We felt we were really in an occupied country."

Speaking to reporters later, Mr. Landsbergis, looking weary from nearly continuous parliamentary and private consultations over the stalemate with Moscow, said that if violence was incited in Lithuania, it "could explode all the Soviet Union."

## **On New Comment by Gorbachev**

President Mikhail S. Gorbachev has made no public comment on the Lithuanian deadlock since Thursday, when he issued the latest in a series of presidential decrees ordering stepped up security, surrender of private weapons and protection of soviet property.

One of his decrees demanded a halt to registration of volunteers for a Lithuanian defense force. Mr. Landsbergis said suggestions in Moscow that army deserters were being directed into these new formations were deliberate distortions.

He warned the young military evaders that the republic would not use force to defend them.

"We cannot physically defend every young man where he is hiding," Mr. Landsbergis said in Parliament, adding, "Those boys who have decided not

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# Lithuania Rejects Moscow's Demand to Turn Over Army Deserters

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to return and finish their military service should not stay with friends, whose addresses might be known. In case of danger they should stay in churches."

A special parliamentary commission created to deal with Lithuanian servicemen estimated that 900 deserters had registered with official shelters around the republic since independence was proclaimed, and that 2,000 more had fled the army but had not checked in with the authorities. About 38,000 Lithuanian men are serving in the armed forces.

The Soviet military views the flight as a major breach of discipline that could cause members of other ethnic minorities to leave the ranks unless the desertions are quickly stopped.

Lithuanian legislators said the mili-

tary's anger over the sheltering of deserters had prompted the pre-dawn show of more than 100 tanks and support vehicles, which roared past the Parliament building as the all-night session was completing the appointment of a new non-Communist administration.

The column disappeared into an army base inside the Vilnius city limits, and there was no further sign of military activity during the day.

## Few Military Vehicles Seen

Few military vehicles of any kind were seen by Western journalists who moved freely today through the Lithuanian capital, the university center of Kaunas and the Lithuanian countryside.

There were no army postings at several border-crossing points with Soviet Byelorussia. A lone helicopter was

spotted flying on the edge of Vilnius.

Some of the Lithuanian soldiers who fled the army sought refuge in a Red Cross shelter set up in a psychiatric hospital on the outskirts of Vilnius by a special parliamentary commission.

About two dozen of them spent a quiet day reading newspapers and dozing on hospital beds, telling visitors they were not afraid that the military would storm the hospital to arrest them.

Romas Gudaitas, a member of Parliament who has been one of Lithuania's main intermediaries with Moscow, said in Parliament today that Anatoly I. Lukyanov, chairman of the Soviet legislature, had assured him in a meeting Friday that Moscow would not use force against Lithuania.

But he said Mr. Lukyanov, a confidant of Mr. Gorbachev, had given him a "categorical no" on the possibility of

negotiations between Moscow and Lithuania and had warned that "the Soviet Union is too powerful to play around with."

The Kremlin has maintained that it is willing to have a "dialogue" with Lithuania but that it holds "negotiations only with foreign countries."

Mr. Gudaitas said in an interview that he had told Mr. Lukyanov that he seemed misinformed about the situation in the republic, and said he asked the Soviet parliamentary chief to help end the Soviet press and television portrait of Lithuania as on the verge of anarchy.

Soviet television continued to give its viewers an alarming portrait of Lithuania that bore little relation to the reality evident on the scene.

The main evening television news program, *Vremya*, tonight described a breakdown of law and order, widespread tension and "super-anti-Soviet elements" running amok.

## Peaceful Saturday Scenes

But across Lithuania, most people were busy going about their Saturday chores.

In villages along the road to Byelorussia, kerchiefed women fed geese and chickens in the front yards of their small wooden homesteads, and children played in freshly turned fields.

The traffic consisted not of jeeps and tanks, but of capped men on bicycles, hay trucks and a postmistress delivering mail from a horsedrawn cart.

The place where tension could be felt was at the headquarters of the parliamentary commission on the military, where only a few young men braved the threat of abduction to register their intent to desert the Soviet army.

Sigdas Norinkevicius, a 21-year-old soldier who was serving in the Leningrad region, came today and asked for refuge from bullying and beatings he said he had endured from army com-



Reuters

Lithuanians registering at a polling station in Vilnius before voting yesterday.

Pages.

### Contact From an Officer

He said an officer from his unit tried to contact him today through a friend, promising that he would not force the young man to return.

But when the friend, a former soldier, met the officer at a train station to discuss Mr. Norinkevicius's fate, military patrols were sweeping the area.

Mr. Norinkevicius took his friend's advice and fled to the commission for sanctuary.

"I know that Lithuania is under siege itself and cannot guarantee my safety," he said. "But nobody has been able to guarantee my safety in the Soviet Army."

Although Mr. Landsbergis had advised soldiers to hide out in churches, several church leaders said tonight that no one had sought sanctuary with them and that they were not sure their prayer houses could shield the young men.

"We cannot guarantee that the Soviet Army won't violate the sanctity of the church and come in here and pull boys away," said a representative of the Catholic Church, who asked that he not be identified.

### Most Apparently on Run

Most of the deserters apparently remained on the run, hiding with friends or sympathizers. About two dozen spent the night at the Red Cross shelter at a psychiatric hospital in the suburb of Novovilnius. As the day wore on, more came to join them.

Many of the former soldiers said they decided to leave the army after harassment and violence at the hands of fellow soldiers angered by Lithuania's drive for independence and because they did not want to serve the army they consider an illegal occupier of their homeland.

They said they expected to stay in the shelter for about a week but were prepared to remain as long as necessary.

"I think the deputies in Parliament are actually in greater danger than we are," said Kestuis Krasauskas, a 21-year-old deserter who came to the shelter two days ago. "If Moscow really wants to put an end to independence, they will go after the Parliament. Their fate weighs heavier than ours."





Associated Press

Defying demands by the Soviet Government, officials in Vilnius refused yesterday to turn over hundreds of Lithuanians who have deserted the Soviet Army. Some of the deserters took refuge yesterday at a hospital in the New Vilnia district of the capital.